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MUSIC

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The King in decline (shown in May 1977) pushed the image of Elvis in his glory days from our minds; Springsteen became the Elvis critics wanted.

COMMENT

The Boss ain't no King

Posing as the heartlander, Springsteen's a mere icon impersonator

JUAN RODRIGUEZ
Special to The Gazette

Elvis Presley was reading The Scientific Search for the Face of Jesus when he landed in his lunch 35 years ago this week. When Bruce Springsteen searched for raw material for The Rising, he phoned up families of 9/11 victims who had idolized him.

It's about the iconography, stupid. The Boss struggles to find his inner common-man. Elvis got lost in his.

Bruce became the wholesome all-American icon before seedy Elvis finally checked out of Heartbreak Hotel. Now, living the community life in a mansion near Monmouth, N.J., he seemed in danger of becoming a dull suburban Elvis, removed and irrelevant. 9/11 was his wake-up call - to be

> **Thanks to Elvis, we went from "How much is that doggie in the window" to "You ain't nuthin' but a hound dog" in one fell swoop.**

"Reborn in the U.S.A.," as a Time cover story put it.

No one wants to end up like Elvis. The rock-critic establishment howled when Albert Goldman's 1981 biography salaciously portrayed a gluttonous hick who devoured grilled peanut butter and banana sandwiches, and girls in white panties. The image has stuck as the one we strangely identify with. "So what if he looks like a wart-hog in heat? / He knows we all love him - we'll just watch him eat," noted Frank Zappa in Elvis Has Just Left the Building.

The Goldman biography - tabloid sleaze, vituperatively told and basically true - was reviled as "an attempt at cultural genocide" by Berkeley eminence grise Greil Marcus (author of Mystery Train and Dead Elvis).

The bio obliterated the memory of Elvis as a one-man cultural revolution. By 1956 he'd injected sex and raw intimacy, country and blues - breaking racial barriers - into a hideously neutered mainstream pop scene. We went from "How much is that doggie in the window" to "You ain't nuthin' but a hound dog" in one fell swoop. As Bob Dylan recalled: "Hearing Elvis for the first time was like a jailbreak - and I didn't even know I was in jail." Youth culture was born. Elvis's creative glory lasted two or three years (1955-57).

Then, beginning with his 1958 induction into the army, came the long goodbye, when he charmed out nearly 20 years of dreck discs and movies. (Granted, stuff like It's Now or Never or Suspicious Minds is camp.) Elvis, and his ubiquitous manager Colonel Tom Parker, virtually patented the concept of "product."

Yet Peter Guralnick hypes Elvis's role in "the continuum of great American vernacular culture ... America's great gift to the world," in his two-volume bio, Last Train to Memphis and Careless Love. This was hailed as a "definitive" corrective to Goldman's book which, Marcus had claimed, "means to make the past meaningless and the present incomprehensible (and) is destructive of (the) people's ability to know itself."

Yet this is precisely how Elvis desecrated rock'n'roll, with tripe like Do the Clam, Yogi Is as Yogi Does and There's No Room to Rumba in a Sports Car, and a dreary flood of Hollywood soundtracks and grim, drugged-out sessions.

The brutal truth is that by the time the Beatles came to the rescue in 1965, Elvis was the enemy, strictly from Squaresville. Cloistered between bedroom and bathroom in Graceland, Vegas or La-La Land, he by-passed the musical revolution that was swept along by Beatlemania (Dylan, Stones, soul, psychedelia).

The Beatles thought he was "an old fart" during their awkward 1963 meeting. Elvis, who didn't know their names, called each "Beatle." He even offered to spy on youth culture for J. Edgar Hoover.

What does all this have to do with Springsteen's "rising" in the ashes of 9/11? Some folks ask: another crass pop exploitation, worthy of The Colonel?

P'shaw, says The Boss. Putting yourself "into shoes you haven't worn," you have to be "just very thoughtful.... You call on your craft, and you go searching for it, and hopefully what makes people listen is that over the years you've been serious and honest."

In effect Bruce is offering press clippings as credentials. He's the Elvis the

> **Bruce Springsteen's The Rising amounts to another of his Hallmark-style greeting cards for every American occasion.**

rock critics always wanted. Carved in Rolling Stone and filtered down the pop pipeline, he's hailed as a heartlander who "explored the country's iconography - cars, escape, freedom, rebellion - as a means of discovering himself" (Louisville Courier-Journal).

Bruce's name come up repeatedly in the Portrait of Grief thumbnail sketches of victims run by the New York Times. A fan on the street shouted, "We need you!" The Boss donned his thinking cap.

The irony is that My City in Ruins was written before the attack; it's ostensibly about the social and physical decay of his beloved Asbury Park and Freehold, N.J. But forget about mourning the death of old-fashioned market capitalism - foundation of the American dream - at the hands of corporate conniving as carry as Colonel Parker's. Too many stars-and-stripes get in the way of seeing beneath the surface.

Springsteen's aesthetic has always been wedded to patriotism. The Rising amounts to another of his Hallmark-style greeting cards for every American occasion, erstwhile wrenching images as stillborn as the slow gauzy fade of soap operas before commercials. He's philosophizin' as the action takes place ("A little revenge and this too shall pass"); it rings hollow, if not downright false. Clichés, no doubt heartfelt, come naturally to him. Back with the E-Street Band, he doles out the standard-issue adult-oriented-rock version of 9/11, uplifting war music from Bruce's Canteen.

The Boss applauds the U.S. invasion in Afghanistan as "handled very, very smoothly." Hey, it's my flag too, he tells The Times of London, decrying the rabid right for trying to "co-opt everything that shows a pride in place and people."

But we knew that in 1984, when he stood in front of huge star-and-bars for the cover of Born in the U.S.A., his monster-selling album. And when Ronald Reagan raided the song for a campaign sound bite (the president, like millions of fans, evidently swept away by its bombast), the bulked-up Boss went mum. He did the clam, sorta like Elvis.

Got milk? Bruce said of Elvis: "It was like he came along and whispered a dream in everybody's ear, and then we dreamt it." Thanks, Boss, but no thanks. That soft-pedals the legacy of Elvis's flaming star - all shook up and blowing everyone away in the dead of the 1950s. Trying to avoid pitfalls with platitudes in a time of war, Bruce can only impersonate that legacy.

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Klezmer gets a breath of fresh air

TONE DEF

Continued from Page D1

He was inspired by a single lesson he took with harmonica player Howard Levy, who has played with Bela Fleck and the Flecktones.

"I started off playing blues and rock on the harmonica," says Rosenblatt, who studied jazz piano composition in Israel, where he lived from 1995 to 1999. "I never thought of klezmer.

"The piano is chromatic. The original harmonica is not designed to play a chromatic scale. Levy developed techniques, through note-bending, overblowing and overdrawing, to play chromatic scales over three octaves. He's a musical genius."

Freshly inspired, Rosenblatt recruited accordionist, beat-master, Hour music journalist and fellow klezmer-phile Josh Dolgin, as well as bassist Ariel Harrod and drummer Thierry Arsenault to form Shtreiml. Oh yeah, and his mom to sing a song or two.

The group recently played in Toronto, where it attracted an audience of "funky, free-thinking people and older Yiddish and Eastern European enthusiasts."

Shtreimel, by the way, means "furry hasidic hat."

◆ ***Shtreiml** launches Harmonica Galitzianer on Tuesday at Casa del Popolo, 4873 St. Laurent Blvd. Call (514) 284-3804.*

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COURTESY OF SHTREIML

Jason Rosenblatt jazzes up traditional klezmer with harmonica.

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Top Singles – Montreal Metro
Week of Aug. 11

This Week	Nationally	Artist/Title	Last Week
1	1	**Elvis vs. JXL**/A Little Less Conversation	1
2	2	**Coldplay**/In My Place	–
3	5	**P. Diddy**/I Need a Girl I & II	3
4	11	**Kylie Minogue**/Love at First Sight	6
5	3	**Nelly**/Hot in Herre	5
6	4	**Pink**/Just Like a Pill	4
7	6	**Chad Kroeger feat. Josey S.**/Hero	2
8	14	**Elton John & Alessa Safina**/Your Song	10
9	7	**Red Hot Chili Peppers**/By the Way	–
10	26	**Sophie Ellis Bextor**/Murder...	8
11	39	**J-Lo**/I'm Gonna Be Alright	–

Top 20 Current Albums – Montreal Metro
Week of Aug. 11

This Week	Nationally	Artist/Title	Last Week
1	1	**Eminem**/Eminem	2
2	2	**Bruce Springsteen**/Rising	1
3	4	**Nelly**/Nellyville	3
4	3	**Avril Lavigne**/Let Go	4
5	6	**XXX**/Soundtrack	–
6	10	**Céline Dion**/A New Day Has Come	5
7	5	**Red Hot Chili Peppers**/By the Way	7
8	9	**Shakira**/Laundry Service	6
9	7	**Pink**/Missundaztood	11
10	18	**Diana Krall**/Look of Love	10
11	16	**Ashanti**/Ashanti	14
12	11	**Enrique Iglesias**/Escape	18
13	23	**Marc Anthony**/Mended	12
14	63	**Les Cowboys Fringants**/Break...	–
15	12	**Josh Groban**/Josh Groban	13
16	8	**Linkin Park**/Reanimation	9
17	22	**Kylie Minogue**/Fever	–
18	55	**M.C. Mario**/Sun Factory 3	15
19	27	**P. Diddy & BadBoy**/We Invented...	20
20	97	**Daniel Bélanger**/Rêver Mieux	19

Top 10 R&B Albums
Week of Aug. 11

This Week	Nationally	Artist/Title	Last Week
1	1	**Eminem**/Eminem Show	1
2	2	**Nelly**/Nellyville	2
3	3	**XXX**/Soundtrack	–
4	4	**Ashanti**/Ashanti	3
5	6	**P. Diddy & BadBoy**/We Invented...	4
6	7	**Remy Shand**/Way I Feel	5
7	10	**Ja Rule**/Pain Is Love	6
8	13	**Alicia Keys**/Songs in A Minor	8
9	5	**Rascalz**/Reloaded	7
10	11	**Ya-Ies Gotti Presents**/Irv Gotti...	–

Top 10 Hard Music
Week of Aug. 11

1	2	**XXX**/Soundtrack	–
2	1	**Red Hot Chilli Peppers**/By the Way	1
3	3	**Linkin Park**/Reanimation	3
4	5	**Our Lady Peace**/Gravity	4
5	6	**Def Leppard**/X	2
6	8	**System of a Down**/Toxicity	6
7	4	**Nickelback**/Silver Side Up	7
8	7	**Papa Roach**/lovehatetragedy	8
9	12	**Korn**/Untouchables	9
10	11	**Fliter**/Amalgamut	5

Rating based on retail record sales Source: SoundScan, Inc.

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